STRATEGIES IN PLACE TO PREVENT DROPOUT FOR STUDENTS ATTENDING URBAN CHARTER SCHOOLS IN A MID-ATLANTIC CITY

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STRATEGIES IN PLACE TO PREVENT DROPOUT FOR STUDENTS ATTENDING URBAN CHARTER SCHOOLS IN A MID-ATLANTIC CITY

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The following literature review details the 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention established by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) as effective in preventing high school dropout. The use of these strategies allows the education system to have a positive impact on the whole student. From early literacy development and family engagement to afterschool programs and career and technology education, these strategies suggest that in order to positively affect the graduation rate in the United States the education system must attempt to reach each child before they enter high school and in areas that are outside of the traditional school day. The current study analyzed available, online information about six urban charter schools in a mid-Atlantic city. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the specific programs that urban charter schools provide to support students path to graduation. This study seeks to analyze the programming currently offered at urban charter schools and categorize the programming using the 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention as the framework. Results of the study demonstrate that there is enough public information available for each school to categorize their programming using the 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention (Overview, 2017) as a framework. However, deficiencies in several categories indicate that the NDPC/N's research was not used during the development each schools' programming.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Graduating from high school has long been a rite of passage in the United States (Herling & Dillon, 2012), and for those that graduate, their lives are often on a path of employment, health benefits, independent housing and more. But for the people who do not meet graduation requirements and choose to drop out of school, their lives are often on a less desirable path (Chappell et al., 2015; Herling & Dillon, 2012). A high school diploma in the United States opens the door to many job opportunities that are not available to high school dropouts (Herling & Dillon, 2012). Those who graduate high school are often healthier and make more money than those that do not graduate high school (Herling & Dillon, 2012; Song & Hsu, 2008). High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, in poor health, living in poverty, in prison, on public assistance, and to have children who also drop out of high school. For children whose parents did graduate from high school, studies show that people who earn their diploma are more likely to positively influence their children's academic futures than those who did not (Song & Hsu, 2008). Examples include, high school graduates go to the library more and talk to their children about education more than those with less than a high school education (Song & Hsu, 2008). High school graduates help their children with homework more than those with less than a high school education and are found to have higher family literacy values than those with less than a high school education (Song & Hsu, 2008).

One's income is also significantly affected by whether he or she has earned a high school diploma. For example, Chappell et al. (2015) state that a high school dropout earns $9,200 less per year than a high school graduate, and about $1 million less over a lifetime than a college graduate. These numbers and statistics make it apparent that there is a strong need to determine the best solutions for keeping students in school through graduation.

On a larger scale, the United States remains a global power, yet ranks 17th among other developed nations in the area of high school graduation (OECD, 2016). For students with disabilities and minority students, the high school graduation rate is even lower. The good news is that there are many stakeholders who are invested in increasing the graduation rate including the Federal Government which has a goal of increasing the national graduation rate to 90% (OECD, 2016).

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, if the United States increased its graduation rate to 90%, approximately 666,000 more people would earn a diploma in one year. With that many more people graduating, economic gains such as: $7.2 billion in increased annual earnings, $1.1 billion in increased federal tax revenues, 65,000 new jobs, $11.5 billion increase in the GDP, $16.8 billion increase in home sales, and $877 million increase in auto sales can be predicted (Amos, 2016).

To support the promotion of high school graduation, The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's developed 15 research-based strategies that positively impact the graduate rate of general education and special education students (Chappell et al., 2015). These strategies are grouped into four categories; fundamental, early intervention, basic, and managing and improving (Chappell et al., 2015). They focus on curriculum within the school system and outside influences such as family involvement and community collaboration. To determine areas

of strength and needs within established school systems, this study reviews the programming that is available in urban charter high schools in a mid-Atlantic city and categorizes the available information using The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's 15 strategies.

1.1 PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Educators who have experience with students who make the decision to drop out of school may understand the larger impact the student's decision will have. Yet, for the student, it may seem like the only option. By using the research to learn how to best support students, schools can become the best resource for a child who has difficulties outside of school. The money, effort, and research needed to increase the national graduation rate is worth the investment due to economic impact created by those who do not earn a high school diploma. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the specific programs that local urban charter schools are implementing. By comparing currently available programs to the research conducted by National Dropout Prevention Center/Network this study aims to determines areas of strength and areas of need.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 2013 the United States ranked 17th among its 35 member countries regarding high school or upper secondary graduation rates (OECD, 2016). With a graduation rate 20% lower than the number one country of Portugal and 10% lower than the U.S. Department of Education's goal of 90% (Duncan & Holder, 2014), the United States has work to do if it wants to remain globally competitive in the area of education. Adding to these disparaging statistics is the graduation rate for students with disabilities, which was a mere 61.9% in 2013 (Shifter, 2015). This subjective population of students has many resources available; however, some strategies, interventions, and educational policies are more effective than others. With a graduation rate 28.1% lower than the United States' target graduation rate of 90%, it is imperative that researchers continue to search for successful dropout prevention strategies specifically in regards to students with disabilities.

Research shows that approximately 1 million students drop out of school each year (Chappell et al., 2015). Even more alarming is that nearly half of all African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans fail to graduate (Chappell et al., 2015). These frightening statistics have consequences that affect the country's economy, public health system, and skilled labor force (Chappell et al., 2015). These numbers and statistics make it apparent that there is a strong need to determine the best strategies for keeping students in school through graduation.

2.1 GOVERNMENT RESPONSES PREVENTING HIGH SCHOOL DROUPOUT

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) compiled a comprehensive list of 15 research-based effective strategies. In addition to the NDPC/N's resources, the national government has intervened to implement programs that keep students in school. The effects of these programs have inadvertently placed blame and pressure on existing organizations.

The state and federal governments have invested millions of dollars in educational reform to positively impact the graduation rate in the United States (Bost & Riccomini, 2016). One state and federal response to dropout prevention is the implementation of teacher rating systems (Performance Profile, 2015). In Pennsylvania for example, public schools are part of a value-added achievement measurement system, which uses various parts of a school's academic profile to determine a score or rating (Performance Profile, 2015). This system is used to rate and compare schools publicly, evaluate teachers (which can directly affect their pay), and determine the distribution of resources ("Pennsylvania School Performance Profile", 2015). The graduation rate is calculated into this value-added model ("Pennsylvania School Performance Profile", 2015). Evaluating teacher performance and determining their pay based partly on high school graduation rates implies that teacher efforts are a direct reflection on a student's decision to ultimately drop out.

The calculation of a teacher's performance rating requires teachers to claim students on their roster. If a student drops out of school, the teachers who had that student on their roster are penalized through the Pennsylvania School Performance Profile rating. Teachers are assigned classes based on their content area (i.e., math, English, biology, etc.), and special education teachers are part of the same rating system as every other content area teacher.

Statistics show that students with disabilities have a significantly higher dropout rate than their non-disabled peers (Schifter, 2015). Following this protocol, special education teachers are at risk of receiving lower pay than other content area teachers. Using graduation rates to determine the quality of education in each school places an unfair burden and blame on the schools and teachers who are in the middle of a systemic issue not within their control.

Teacher rating models have not been the only reaction from state and federal governments to reduce dropout rates. Using a concept of weeding out the bad kids so the good kids can flourish, Zero Tolerance was implemented to combat dropout and discipline problems (Losinski et al., 2014). Beginning in the late 1980s, schools began adopting Zero Tolerance policies which objectively handed out harsh, predetermined punishments for violations such as bringing a weapon to school (Losinski, Katsiyannis, Ryan & Baughan, 2014; "Position Statement 46: Zero Tolerance Policies in Schools," 2014; Reynolds, Skiba, Graham, Conoley, & Garcia-Vazquez, 2008). A strong push for more Zero Tolerance policies came in 1994 with a federal mandate called the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA). The GFSA required automatic expulsion of any student who brings a firearm to school (Losinski et al., 2014). Schools were forced to adopt Zero Tolerance policies or federal funding would be revoked through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Losinski et al., 2014). Once a district adopts a Zero Tolerance policy the specifics can vary, but many have expanded the policy to include zero tolerance of drugs, toys that represent firearms, truancy, insubordination, etc. (Losinski et al., 2014; Holmquist, 2014). Zero Tolerance was designed to help make schools safer, so students could learn. However, there were unintended consequences related to dropout rates and exposure to authorities outside of the school system.

As the education system works to impact graduation rates positively, another organization that is feeling the effects of student dropout is the juvenile justice system. In 2013, Kirk and Sampson (2013) cited research correlating juvenile arrests with poor educational outcomes, highlighting the strong connection between being arrested as an adolescent and dropping out of high school. In their study of the Chicago Public School system, students who were not arrested had a graduation rate of 64% with 35% of students enrolling in a four-year college. For students who were arrested, only 26% graduated. Of those who graduated, only 16% enrolled in a four-year school (Kirk & Sampson, 2013). If a student with a weak connection to school is arrested dropping out can become a realistic option (Kirk & Sampson, 2013). According to Kirk and Sampson (2013), little difference exists between arrestees and non-arrestees in IQ. However, arrested youth are more likely to have failed a grade and to have been enrolled in a remedial course or special education class (Kirk & Sampson, 2013).

The juvenile justice system has also had to bear the burden of dealing with many discipline problems that happen in school. Additionally, Zero Tolerance critics argue the policy has caused the police and juvenile justice system to be part of the discipline process that would have otherwise been handled in the school alone. When schools outsource discipline to the police and juvenile justice system, students are exposed to a level of authority that increases their chances of dropping out (Losinski et al., 2014).

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2.2 POSITIVELY IMPACTING THE GRADUATION RATE

Researchers have long been attempting to figure out ways in which the educational system can better support high school graduation, but have failed to make a significant and positive impact on the graduation rate (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). The information detailed above demonstrates that need for a systemic approach to positively impacting the graduation rate. For students with disabilities, the situation is even direr since they are twice as likely to drop out of high school as their non-disabled peers (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). The federal and state governments have systemically intervened to support the educational system's success in graduating students who are prepared for life after high school. Policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are just two governmental policies that have been implemented to ensure positive changes in the ways students are educated (Bost & Riccomini, 2006).

While governmental responses to increasing the graduation rate were not ill-intended, they have not proven to be effective (Reynolds et al., 2008). To combat the largely ineffective governmental response to drop out, the NDPC/N has made it its mission to reduce dropout rates nationwide. The NDPC/N has partnered with local education departments, school districts, hosted workshops, national conferences, and collaborated with policymakers to help expand their resources and focus on their mission. During this time, researchers associated with the NDPC/N identified 15 research-based strategies that have the most positive impact on high school graduation rates (Chappell et al., 2015). These 15 strategies were broken into four categories; Fundamental Strategies, Early Interventions, Basic Core Strategies, and Managing and Improving Instruction. Although these strategies are independent of one another, in practice they work well together and frequently overlap (Chappell et al., 2015). Further, the NDPC/N has

gathered evidence that these strategies can be successful in all school levels from K-12 and in rural, suburban, or urban settings (Chappell et al., 2015).

2.3 FUNDAMENTAL STRATEGIES

The first category described by the NDPC/N focuses on larger school systems including Systematic Approach, School-Community Collaboration, and Safe Learning Environments (Chappell et al., 2015). These structures can be implemented through school programs and policies that are developed administratively. According to an article published in the Journal of Educational Administration, Van der Vegt et al. (2001), describes the complex barriers associated with implementing educational policy changes due to pressure being placed on the organization and on teachers. It is important to recognize that if schools truly adopt the NDPC/N's research-based strategies, significant changes within the identity of the organization may be necessary. Program equity, capacity, and public relations are all relevant factors when eliciting change (Adams, 1994; Van der Vegt et al., 2001). As organizations develop reforms focused on keeping students in school, it is imperative for changes to be realistic. Impacting the graduation rate will take time, but by developing strong policies that it is reasonable to believe change will happen over time.

2.3.1 Systematic approach

The NDPC/N describes the systemic approach as an ongoing process, which considers input from various stakeholders when developing programs, selecting research-based strategies,

and in decision making (Overview, 2017). To efficiently and positively affect the school system the process "requires the alignment of school policies, procedures, practices, and organizational structures and continuous monitoring of effectiveness." (Overview, 2017).

This broad definition encompasses many areas of an educational organization and seems to take on two levels of management. One level is the development of permanent or semi-permanent aspects of the organization such as a vision statement or policy, and the other level being areas of the organization that are continuously changing such as mentoring, interventions, and data-based decision-making.

For this research specifically, developing school-wide policies and programs that are effective can be viewed as the first step in preventing school dropouts. The educational system challenges stakeholders with the task of developing policies and programs that are cost-efficient and have a positive impact on the data. The NDPC/N includes the process of ongoing evaluation as part of this strategy (Overview, 2017), indicating the importance of reviewing and editing policies and programs even after they are in place.

2.3.2 School-community collaboration

It is crucial for schools and communities to work together in an ongoing evaluative process that allows for community members to actively participate in the school system (Overview, 2017). This collaboration can be powerful and effective as community members feel responsible for the quality of education students are receiving (Overview, 2017). Community support in preventing student drop out is a foundational feature of a multidimensional approach to positively affecting the graduation rate.

As schools continuously work to find ways to address student dropout rates, it is apparent that schools alone cannot combat this problem. Because of this, some researchers have focused their efforts on gaining an understanding of the impact community-based programs have on keeping students in school (Charmaraman, 2011). Geller, Zuckerman, and Seidel (2016) found that community-based organizations (CBOs) have three points of interest for collaborating with schools. The first is to better serve their clients (Geller, Zuckerman, & Seidel, 2016). For example, multi-lingual students translating information, documents or policies from English to other languages would support the role of the organization in helping its clientele. Second, CBOs have substantial interests in public good such as exposing youth to social justice, simulating adult life skills, and volunteer work (Geller et al., 2016). Lastly, CBOs are more appealing to funders and donors when they are engaged in collaborative projects with youth (Geller et al., 2016). CBOs can generate support, advertise their mission, gain perspective, and expand their resource base by generating partnerships with young people (Geller et al., 2016).

Geller, Zuckerman, and Seidel (2016) also present challenges that associated with these collaborations. The primary challenge being the differences in how organizations and schools measure success (Geller et al., 2016). For example, schools measure success in student outcomes whereas organizations measure success in deliverables such as the number of volunteer hours people produce (Geller et al., 2016).

When weighing the benefits against the challenges it is essential to look at the overarching theme concerning dropout prevention. The NDPC/N includes school-community collaborations at part of its 15 effective strategies, which is indicative of the value in establishing such relationships. By developing relationships with CBOs, students have opportunities to learn ways to become civically engaged citizens (Geller et al., 2016).

2.3.3 Safe learning environments

Creating a safe learning environment is important for any school district regardless of their graduation rate. A safe learning environment gives students the opportunity to focus on academics, social interaction, and extra-curricular activities instead of worrying or being fearful during school. Schools must provide students with the safest environment possible, and they can do this by developing violence prevention plans and policies that offer school personnel and students options for unsafe situations.

One of the most well-known and supported policies at the forefront of student dropout is Zero Tolerance. Even though Zero Tolerance has been widely accepted as an appropriate measure for students who cannot follow school rules, Zero Tolerance had significant and unintended consequences. An initial review of this policy may lead one to believe that since the policy is clear and there are predetermined consequences, that discipline will be handled more efficiently. However, data shows that Zero Tolerance policies do not make schools safer or more conducive to learning (Reynolds et al., 2008). Additionally, once students are suspended from school, their chances of dropping out of high school increase (Losinski et al., 2014). With high school graduation rates that are significantly lower than many other developed countries, the U.S. needs to be focused on keeping students in school. Add on to that the fact that students with disabilities are subject to Zero Tolerance policies and a disproportionate amount of minority students are directly affected by Zero Tolerance policies (Duncan & Holder, 2014). Black students are three times more likely than white students to be given out-of-school suspension or expelled (Duncan & Holder, 2014). Students with disabilities are twice as likely to be given out-of-school suspension or to be expelled than their non-disabled peers (Duncan & Holder, 2014). Approximately 6.4 million students are identified as having a disability (Shifter, 2015) or 12% of

the school population. Additionally, 25% of students who were arrested at school had a disability ("Position Statement 46: Zero Tolerance Policies in Schools," 2014). For black students, the numbers are even more disparaging. Black students account for approximately 16% of the school population. Moreover, 31% of arrests at school are of students of color (Duncan & Holder, 2014).

The reality is that even if this policy can be easily implemented into the school system, it does not produce the outcomes for which it was intended. As mentioned earlier, Zero Tolerance policies do not make schools safer or more conducive for learning (Reynolds et al., 2008), and in fact increase the chances of a student dropping out of high school (Losinski et al., 2014). As schools work to develop a safe learning environment for students and staff, policy developers must understand and be aware of policies that have a negative impact on education.

2.4 EARLY INTERVENTIONS

The second category outlined by the NDPC/N includes three elements where the groundwork is already laid in the world of high school graduation; Family Engagement, Early Childhood Education, and Early Literacy Development. Early intervention can proactively impact the effects of "poverty and inadequate learning environments on child development and school success. A broad range of early educational interventions is found to produce meaningful, lasting effects on cognitive, social, and schooling outcomes." (Barnett, 2011). A relatable misconception of understanding school dropout is that one's decision to quit school is solely based on their current educational situation (Bost & Riccomini, 2016).

2.4.1 Family engagement

One of the realities of a high school dropout is that a student's decision is made up of some factors that are not directly related to the school (Bost & Riccomini, 2016). Research shows that family engagement and involvement in a student's education greatly affects the decision to drop out of high school (Ziomek-Daigle, 2010). Family involvement, or lack thereof, naturally affects a student's decision to drop out. For example, parent involvement can affect attendance, behaviors at school, and a student's overall view of the importance of education. Additionally, students are more likely to drop out if they have a parent who did not graduate high school (Ziomek-Daigle, 2010). Schools do not have the power, money, or time to change each family's involvement in a child's education. However, there is evidence that families are more likely to be involved when the school reaches out to them (Ziomek-Daigle, 2010). According to the NDPC/N's description of family engagement as a strategy to prevent dropout, it is also "the most accurate predictor of a student's success in school." (Overview, 2017).

2.4.2 Early childhood education

Even though preventing high school dropouts may seem like a secondary education problem, Charmaraman (2011) explains that the lengthy process of disengagement from school begins before the kindergarten. The possibilities for students to become at-risk for dropping out of school are endless considering the number of years they spend in the education system. Early childhood education is an essential part of establishing skills that support success in school. Early childhood education can be viewed as the cornerstone of developing a more literate society with increased graduation rates. In their 2017 report, The Literacy Project Foundation stated that

to determine the number of prison beds needed in future years some states base part of their projection on how well current elementary students are performing on reading tests. As disheartening as this seems, it is a clear indication that early literacy development and early childhood education have a long-lasting impact on children and their life path. Reading and mathematics are the foundations of primary school curriculum (Alexander et al., 1997) and the development of even the most basic skills in these areas can impact all future learning (Alexander et al., 1997).

To reach the Department of Education's graduation rate goal of 90%, early literacy skills should be addressed intentionally and specifically during the preschool years. Once a child is school-aged, they are charged with the task of learning to read. Learning to read has become one of the most important skills learned during childhood, and children who experience difficulties with learning to read are at a higher risk for possible academic failure (Dennis & Horn, 2011). Children who struggle with reading are not only at risk for school failure but are also more likely to struggle with social and emotional issues, delinquency, and drug abuse (Dennis & Horn, 2011). Therefore, it is essential to develop basic reading skills early so that those skills can be built upon as students' progress through school. Dennis and Horn (2011) point out that early literacy skill development is a critical component of developing future reading difficulties.

In a 2012 article that presents findings on kindergarten interventions for students at-risk for having a reading disability or needing additional intervention, O'Connor et al. (2012) identified underlying reading skills that can be mastered by most students in kindergarten or first grade. Reading skill development is essential to the early educational process. Early intervention in these areas before a student experiences significant failure in their effort to learn to read may have positive long-term outcomes (O'Conner et al., 2012). O'Connor et al. (2012)

looked at studies that have explored the benefits of interventions in kindergarten, first grade, or needed through kindergarten and first grade, and found positive effects on reading development.

2.4.3 Early literacy development

Literacy development is arguably one of the most complex areas of the NDPC/N's recommended effective strategies because there are various, intricate levels of literacy. Being consider literate is two-fold, it is partially the ability to read and write and also, the ability to apply basic "knowledge that develops during the whole lifetime, not only during school years" (Vágvölgyi et al., 2016). Those who are not literate may fall into the category of being illiterate, functionally illiterate or being a hidden illiterate. The distinctions between these categories are significant, especially in relation to predicting high school dropout. An illiterate person is someone who never attended school and cannot read or write even single words (Vágvölgyi et al., 2016). A relatable example of illiteracy is a person who speaks and reads only one language is illiterate in other languages (Blumenfeld, 2012). Illiteracy is an epidemic in this country. For example, according to the Literacy Project Foundation, 75% of people on welfare and 60% of people in prison cannot read (Getset4literacy, 2012). The United States' issues with illiteracy do not stop there.

Functional illiteracy in the United States is defined as someone who has received 12 years of education but can only recognize some characters and configurations and cannot decode written language (Blumenfeld, 2012). Functional illiteracy is commonly referred to as dyslexia (Blumenfeld, 2012). Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability that affects word reading, word decoding, oral reading fluency and spelling (Dyslexia Facts and Statistics, 2015). Dyslexia affects approximately 40 million people, and worse yet, only 2 million people know they have it

(Dyslexia Facts and Statistics, 2015). However, only about 50% of functional illiterates have dyslexia (Al-Lamki, 2012). The other 50% of people who suffer from functional illiteracy may do so for other reasons such as not receiving an appropriate education or due to having a severe learning disability. Dyslexia is one disability that impacts reading, but other disabilities can affect a person's ability to learn to read, such as attention deficit disorder (ADHD) (Al-Lamki, 2012) or a specific learning disability in the area of reading. According to an article about dyslexia's impact on society, Al-Lamki (2012), states that about 35% of people who have dyslexia drop out of school. Additionally, 27% of high school dropouts have a learning disability (Al-Lamki, 2012).

The depth of illiteracy continues with hidden literacy. Hidden illiteracy, although not a commonly researched form of literacy, is when a person is not aware of their ignorance (Hubbard, n.d.). Hidden illiterates do not fully comprehend information or ideas and are not aware they do not understand. Their actions, feelings, and beliefs are founded on their unknown wrong beliefs, ideas, and understandings (Hubbard, n.d.). Characteristics of a hidden illiterate include; products or projects not being completed and jobs being unfinished or poorly done. Hidden illiteracy blocks quality production (Hubbard, n.d.).

Being literate in the United States can have significant and positive impacts on one's quality of life and their contribution to society. The Literacy Project Foundation (2017) outlines these statistics (see Table 1).

Table 1. Impacts of Dropping Out of High School

The Nation	• In a study of literacy among 20 'high income' countries; the United States ranked 12th • Illiteracy has become such a severe problem in our country that 44 million adults are now unable to read a simple story to their children • 50% of adults cannot read a book written at an 8th-grade level • 45 million are functionally illiterate and read below a 5th-grade level • 44% of the American adults do not read a book in a year • 6 out of 10 households do not buy a single book in a year
The Economy	• 3 out of 4 people on welfare cannot read • 20% of Americans read below the level needed to earn a living wage • 50% of the unemployed between the ages of 16 and 21 cannot read well enough to be considered functionally literate • Between 46 and 51% of American adults have an income well below the poverty level because of their inability to read • Illiteracy costs American taxpayers an estimated $20 billion each year • High school dropouts cost our nation $240 billion in social service expenditures and lost tax revenues
Impact on Society	• 3 out of 5 people in American prisons cannot read • 85% of juvenile offenders have problems reading • Approximately 50% of Americans read so poorly that they are unable to perform simple tasks such as reading prescription drug labels

The statistics from The Literacy Project Foundation make it clear that the importance of reading development and education are tied to one's future role in society. Learning to read early in life happens in two environments: at home and at school. The term home-literacy is used to describe the literacy-related interactions, resources, and attitudes that children experience at home (Hamilton et al., 2016). Hamilton et al. (2016) suggest that "home-literacy interactions provide a social context for children's earliest encounters with the printed word, and... assumes an important role for experienced others (most often parents) in children's early literacy development."

Much of the research about predictors of high school dropouts focus on the adolescent years. While those studies are significant to educators and parents alike, early literacy development is another area of research that cannot be overlooked.

2.5 BASIC CORE STRATEGIES

Shifting the focus from larger systems within a school to specific program development, basic core strategies emphasizes additional programming outside of the traditional classroom to keep students engaged in school. Mentoring, tutoring, service-learning, alternative schooling, and after school and out-of-school opportunities allow educators to fill gaps where students are struggling academically and behaviorally intentionally. Instead of proactively attempting to engage students through early intervention, these basic core strategies are a responsive approach to students who may not be on a direct path to graduation.

2.5.1 Mentoring/tutoring

While no single factor is completely indicative that a student will drop out of high school, feelings of not belonging, weak connections to teachers and a general dislike of school all contribute to disengagement from school, which can be a predictor of school dropout (Charmaraman, 2011). As early as elementary school, students can demonstrate behaviors associated with disengagement such as stomach aches, absences, behavioral problems, and low reading skills (Bost & Riccomini, 2016). Mentoring is listed as one of the NDPC/N's 15 effective strategies because mentors and tutors offer structure, support, and individual attention to students (Overview, 2017). Additionally, a commonly identified reason cited by students who have dropped out is a lack of a sense of belonging (Bost & Riccomini, 2016). The research done by Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) echoes these statements by explaining that the combination of failing to engage students with outside forces such as poverty lead to disengagement and eventual dropout.

Mac Iver et al., (2016) describes mentoring as "a means of personal intervention," which is most effective when academic performance is assessed as an outcome. There are varying levels of mentoring including school-based mentoring, community-based mentoring, adult-student mentoring, peer mentoring, adult-student tutoring, and peer tutoring (Mac Iver et al., 2016: Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). However, frequent sessions with specific academic support are the most effective ways to provide mentoring that positively affects student performance in school (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004).

2.5.2 Service learning

The NDPC/N and The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse both describe serving-learning as an actual teaching strategy (Overview, 2017; Geller et al., 2016) that attempts "to create meaningful community service with instruction and reflection" (Geller et al., 2016). Based on the research of Geller, Zuckerman, and Seidel (2016) when service-learning is used as a teaching strategy, it is "mutually reinforcing" because students are more receptive to learning when they feel they have delivered a meaningful service (Geller et al., 2016). When the educational system can integrate service-learning as a mean of teaching curriculum, students experience valued civic participation in their communities (Zaff & Lerner, 2010). Zaff & Lerner (2010) describe examples of service-learning projects being incorporated into classes where students can learn about government agencies or local community agencies and identify the problems they feel need to be addressed. By allowing students to identify the issues they feel are relevant to them or their communities, they are more likely to be engaged in planning solutions and reflecting on their experiences (Zaff & Lerner, 2010).

2.5.3 Alternative schooling & credit recovery

Alternative schooling is one way to individualize student education. These non-traditional delivery models allow students to earn credits towards graduation while also paying close attention to each student's individual academic need, social needs, and career goals (Overview, 2017).

Students who stray from the typical path towards graduation may find themselves in trouble at school. When a student violates a school policy and is expelled from school, school districts are still required to provide that student with a free and appropriate public education (Duncan, 2010). Typically, this means that the student must attend an alternative education program at the cost of the district, which in some cases can become quite costly. The cost of sending a student to an alternative education program can range from $7,552 for a regular education student to $9,369-16,921 for a special education student (Freeman, 2012). According to a report released by 11 school districts in the state of Texas, an alternative education program can be three times as much the cost of educating a student in the regular classroom (Freeman, 2012).

By taking a proactive approach, schools can develop programs providing students with other options such as online schools, blended schedules, summer courses, etc. School districts can work on developing a strong guidance counseling program with both group and individual sessions on appropriate behaviors, social interactions, anger management, drug and alcohol abuse, and more. Students may be more inclined to seek help before they participate in an action that would cause them to be expelled from school if the school takes a strong proactive stance on guidance counseling.

Schools can also save money by offering an alternative education program within the school instead of having to outsource it. Schools can make money by providing credit recovery classes during school breaks. Both options allow students to stay on track with their peers, which promotes success instead of pushing them closer to the door.

2.5.4 After-school/out-of-school opportunities

As schools continuously work to find ways to address student dropout rates, it is apparent that schools alone cannot combat this problem. This idea has caused researchers to focus their efforts on gaining an understanding of the role community-based programs have on retaining students (Charmaraman, 2011). According to Charmaraman (2011), out-of-school-time (OST) can play a critical role in supporting academic success.

Many schools provide after-school and summer programs that provide students with access to clubs, group, and volunteer opportunities. These experiences are especially important for students at risk of school failure because these programs fill the afternoon "gap time" with productive and engaging activities (Chappell et al., 2015). In communities where resources and programs are lacking, it is even harder for young people to find opportunities to engage in their community (Charmaraman, 2011).

One of the most positive ways to support students is to design and implement school-community collaboration and after-school opportunities (Chappell et al., 2015). Preventing school dropout is an issue that can be addressed at school, at home, and in the community. Cities all over the country have developed community-based and OST programs to support and encourage students to complete high school (Charmaraman, 2011). Unfortunately, the

development and implementation of these programs have not always been well documented, which makes it difficult to determine its effect on dropout prevention.

To gain greater insight, Linda Charmaraman conducted a study that compared the top 50 evidenced-based dropout programs (Charmaraman, 2011). The research on these top 50 evidenced-based programs produced several overlapping concepts. In 75% of these programs, students were taught life-skills such as communication skills, healthy relationships, problem-solving and decision-making skills, critical thinking, assertiveness, peer resistance and selection, stress reduction, leadership, and appreciation for diversity (Charmaraman, 2011). Life-skills strategies were included in more OST programs than any other strategy. Behind life-skills strategies were family strengthening activities including ways for parents to support their children academically (Charmaraman, 2011). Academic support was the third most frequent strategy used by OST programs (Charmaraman, 2011).

The skills that Charmaraman (2011) noted in her research about after-school programs can be reiterated at school through guidance counseling and elective classes. Providing students who are at risk of dropping out of school with additional learning opportunities may not always seem like a desirable option especially for the student, but many of the students who are at risk need these additional engaging opportunities.

2.6 MANAGING AND IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

The previous category focused on specific school programs that support student success in high school. Once those programs have been established, schools must continuously evaluate the programs being offered to students to determine their effectiveness and relevance. This

category pays special attention to evaluation as a means of support for teachers and program development as a support for students. Professional Development, Active Learning, Educational Technology, and Individualized Instruction are ways teachers can improve the learning environment for students. Additionally, Career and Technology Education (CTE) is a research-based program that can effectively meet the needs of the student along with the larger demands of today's workforce (Overview, 2017).

2.6.1 Professional development

According to the NDPC/N, educators who work with students that are at-risk of dropping out of high school often benefit from consistent professional development (Overview, 2017). Professional development offers supports for educators in learning about applicable instructional strategies (Overview, 2017). Appropriate professional development is relevant to the educators' student population and student needs. Administrators must work to provide teachers with the resources they need to understand the population of students they are continuously teaching. Professional development related to curriculum and current social issues can guide teachers who are struggling to reach the at-risk youth that they are charged with educating. Fortunately, there are many professional development opportunities that do not cost anything to attend. Additionally, school districts including public charter schools that are eligible to receive Title 2A must spend those funds on professional development. Teachers have opportunities to attend on-site sessions or webinars through their local Intermediate Unit or PaTTAN.

2.6.2 Active learning/student engagement

For students who lose interest in school, it is essential for the education system to work towards re-engaging them. Otherwise, they may drop out of high school. In addition to truancy and failing grades, boredom in school has been listed as one of the main reasons students drop out (Reschley et al., 2006; Issue - ACTE, 2007). Marc Iver, Sheldon, Naeger and Clark (2016) found strong connections between the students' view of their teachers' commitment to teaching and dropping out of high school. Marc Iver et al. (2016) also found a relationship between the students who had failed classes during their ninth-grade school year and students who had eventually dropped out of high school. These findings demonstrated students' desire to feel welcomed and wanted in school. Students who feel their teachers are just teaching to earn a paycheck and are not teaching to engage them in learning are more likely to feel disenfranchised by the educational system. Students who were surveyed indicated that they were influenced by their teachers' commitment to student learning (Marc Iver et al., 2016). The commitment must be perceived by the student as genuine, and the activities must be perceived as interesting and engaging to keep students on track for learning (Marc Iver et al., 2016). Mac Iver and Mac Iver (2009) found that student performance in school is related to student-teacher relationships and teacher-teacher relationships. Their research identified that students' perceptions of how teachers work with each other had an impact on student engagement in school (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009). Creating an atmosphere of trust between students and teachers coupled with providing support to students are impactful was to support high school graduation (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009). When students feel their teachers care about their learning, it positively influences their performance in the class.

Active learning embraces teaching strategies that engage and involve students in the learning process. When educators show them that there are different ways to learn, students can find new and creative ways to solve problems, achieve success, and become lifelong learners (Doren, Murray, & Gau, 2014; Reschley & Christenson, 2006). One active learning strategy, known as the Check and Connect Model, has proven to be useful in identifying students who are at risk of dropping out and in developing activities with the goal of re-engaging students in school (Sinclair, Christenson & Thurlow, 2005; Sinclair et al, 1998; Doren, Murray & Gau, 2014; Reschley & Christenson, 2006). Based on an evaluation of the Check and Connect Model, the NDPC/N for Students with Disabilities found that students were less likely to drop out at the end of four or five years than those who were not provided with Check and Connect (Wilkins, 2014).

Another way to increase student engagement that is also listed as one of the NDPC/N's 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention is through Career and Technology Education (Chappell et al., 2015). Career and Technology Education has the agenda of providing students with a purpose, and for some students, it may answer the question, "Why do I have to do this?" (Issue - ACTE, 2007). The Association for Career and Technology Education explains five potential benefits for at-risk students: enhancement of students' motivation and academic achievement, increase in personal and social competence related to work in general, a broad understanding of an occupation or industry, career exploration and planning, and the acquisition of knowledge or skills related to employment in specific occupations or more generic work competencies (Issue - ACTE, 2007). More on Career and Technology Education can be found in the section titled Career and Technology Education (CTE).

2.6.3 Educational technology

Technology can be used in a variety of ways to actively engage students in the learning process (Overview, 2017). Technology can individualize instruction, act as an incentive for students to complete their work, or as a support to assist students in the learning process. Research from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network states that educational technology can help prepare students for the workforce (Overview, 2017). One of the most beneficial reasons for using technology in the classroom is that it adapts to needs of students and creates an authentic learning environment (Overview, 2017).

Researchers who focus on the various aspects of a students' decision to drop out of school continuously reference the idea of student engagement. For example, Reschely & Christenson (2006) describe the relevance of such cognitive components that contribute to one's decision such as boredom in school, the relevance of education to the future, and self-regulation. One way to decrease boredom and address the relevance of education to their future is by incorporating technology into the curriculum. Many schools are actively seeking to engage students through interactive white-boards and one-to-one technology on individual tablets and computers (Henrie, Halverson, & Graham, 2015). Technology can be adapted to meet the needs of students with varying abilities. Differentiated instruction and educational technology are one in the same when students have access to applications and websites specific to the content being taught.

Another aspect of educational technology is assistive technology (AT), which is used to support the need of students with disabilities, so they can participate in the general education setting (Simpson et al., 2009). Students with disabilities can us AT is designed to complete assignments and tasks that they would not otherwise be able to complete (Simpson et al., 2009).

Additionally, they can support student independence and productivity (Simpson et al., 2009). As technology continues to develop, AT is an area that is continuously changing, and some areas of AT are more commonly implemented than others. For example, a word processor is an example of an assistive technology that is used to support students who have difficulties with written expression (Simpson et al., 2009). Other examples of AT include wheelchairs, adjustable desks, and speech synthesizers (Simpson et al., 2009).

Technology in education seems to have no bounds, and the reality is, it supports student learning by adapting to individual student needs and engaging them in the learning process (Overview, 2017; Simpson et al., 2009). Using technology to deliver content, connect learners, and enable anytime, anywhere learning (Henrie, Halverson, & Graham, 2015) is here stay and schools have the autonomy to determine how much or how little they want to implement it.

2.6.4 Individualized instruction

Differentiated instruction, response to intervention, research-based intervention, individualized instruction, etc. are all ways of adapting the standard curriculum to meet the needs of the learner. The goal of these teaching strategies is to close gaps in student achievement (Connor et al., 2013). In the early 1900s, as public school enrollment rapidly increased, educators and administrators needed to find ways to educate a variety of students instead of only the most elite students (Rumberger, 2011). Differentiated instruction began as a solution to growing enrollment as a way to efficiently educate students by the masses who would essentially go in various directions with their lives. Schools had a responsibility to educate "different students for different positions they would assume in adult life" (Rumberger, 2011). The concept of individualized instruction is based on the knowledge that students learn at different

rates of speed and that learning by mastering one concept before moving onto the next benefits the student's retention of material (Muse, 1998). Mastery learning or individualized instruction begins with assessment (Muse, 1998), which allows the educator to determine a starting point for each student. Once a student is assessed the process of learning begins with providing material to the student that offers challenges while also being attainable (Muse, 1998). Frequent and continuous assessments are used to determine the need for remediation or acceleration (Muse, 1998). Individualized instruction has proven to help students learn how to learn, retain information and transfer of information to other situations (Muse, 1998).

2.6.5 Career and technology education (CTE)

Career and technology education is an enticing route for many students who want to learn a skill or who do not feel they are as academically inclined as some of their peers. According to the NDPC/N, a quality CTE program prepares students to measure up to the broader demands of today's workplace (Chappell et al., 2015). In an article by Wagner, Newman, and Javitz (2016) two significant statistics emerged; research found that non-college-bound students who participated in career and technical education programs increased their odds of graduating by 6%, and students who completed three or more years of career and technical education courses had a 90% chance of graduating. For students with disabilities, career and technical education have positively impacted graduation rates (Wagner et al., 2016). In addition to positively impacting graduation rates for students with disabilities, career and technical education have proven to be effective in supporting post-high school employment and increased earnings (Wagner et al., 2016).

2.7 SUMMARY

Across these 15 strategies, there are many commonalities, but one theme stands out; engagement. When family supports student engagement, teacher, community and administrative engagement produce results that are clear; increases in graduation rates (Chappell et al., 2015). The reality is students who are engaged in school are less likely to drop out (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009), and by reviewing the list of strategies described above, connections can be found between student engagement and research-based recommendations. For example, engaging students is part of school-collaboration, employing a safe learning environment, early childhood education, early literacy development, mentor/tutoring, service-learning, alternative schooling, after-school and out-of-school opportunities, active learning, educational technology, individualized instruction, and career and technology education.

As families understand more about what schools can offer, they can make better choices about children's education. More and more parents can implement school choice or choosing to enroll their children in a school other than their neighborhood public school (EDChoice, 2018). School choice, or the parent's right to decide where to educate their child, empowers parents with options (Focus on the Family, 2008). Parents mainly can choose between local public schools and public charter schools (EDChoice, 2018; Focus on the Family, 2008). These schools operate like a traditional public school but offer unique and specific programs which are geared towards meeting the needs of the community where they are located (Focus on the Family, 2008). Charter schools are bound to the specific programs detailed in their charter application and even though charter schools offer unique programs they are required to enroll all students regardless of their race, color, sex, religion, or education needs (EDChoice, 2018). Charter schools are the most popular and fastest growing form of public school choice (Focus on

the Family, 2008). The ability to choose different schools combined with the uniqueness of charter schools and the essential programs schools can provide to prevent dropout make charter schools an important entity to examine.

2.8 RESEARCH QUESTION

In a perfect world, the efforts of the schools, families, and communities would come together and unite to form a "graduation team" (Ziomek-Daigle, 2010) and students would accept those efforts and choose to stay in school. Until then, researchers must continue to focus their efforts on effective strategies and programs for dropout prevention. Urban charter schools are the local educational organizations that serve general education students and special education students. By focusing on local urban charter schools in a mid-Atlantic city, this study finds areas of strength and weakness related to educational programming. The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention serves as the foundation for this research and study. A comparative textual analysis of publicly available information was conducted to categorize current school programming using the 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention. Schools chosen for this study met the criteria of being an urban charter school with grades 9-12 in a specific mid-Atlantic city.

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network recommends 15 researched-based strategies that have a positive impact on graduation rates. Are programs that are being implemented by urban charter schools in a mid-Atlantic city able to be categorized in a way that fits the recommended strategies?

3.0 METHODS

The research being done by the NDPC/N has made significant gains in developing strategies for school districts to use to support and promote high school graduation. Expansion of this research is needed to continue increasing graduation rates. The purpose of this research is to determine the extent to which urban charter schools in a mid-Atlantic city are implementing programs that are relevant to these strategies.

As mentioned above, The NDPC/N suggests developing a program that uses all 15 strategies together. Currently, there is not any one program that encompasses all 15 strategies, but school districts do have a vested interest in increasing graduation rates. Some of the reasons why only some of the suggested strategies are used could be funding, personnel, or a lack of knowledge about what the research says. To answer the research question, a 4-step process was used to identify the pertinent information.

3.1 STEP 1 – SCHOOL DETERMINATION

Data collection using publicly available information was used to research how local, urban charter schools are supporting students so that they can meet graduation requirements. To gather data, an initial internet search was conducted to identify urban charter schools in the mid-Atlantic city. Charter schools with, at least, grades 9-12 were selected for further inquiry. A

total of five schools matched the criteria of being a charter, located in the mid-Atlantic city, with grades 9-12. One additional school, which is designed to support students ages 17 – 21 who have not been able to finish high school, was selected to gain a better understanding of the programs used to support the needs of students who are significantly at risk of failing to earn a high school diploma.

The urban charter schools chosen for this study are Title 1 schools with a special education population ranging from 10%-40% (see table 2). Schools have been given pseudonyms and reported percentages have been rounded to maintain confidentiality.

Table 2. Charter School Demographic Information

School	Grades	Total Students	% Special Ed.	% white students	%African American Students	Graduation Rate
The Compass Academy Charter School	Grades 8-12	200	30%	10%	90%	70%
Capital Charter School	Grades 9-12	600	10%	40%	50%	90%
Universal Learners of America Charter School	Ages 17-21 who have not rcvd a diploma	70	10%	0%	100%	90%
Upward Directions Charter School	Grades 6-12	300	10%	0%	100%	90%
Pillar (Campus 1)	K-12	800	20%	20%	70%	80%
Pillar (Campus 2)	K-12	600	20%	<1%	99%	70%

(Graphiq Inc., 2017; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017)

3.2 STEP 2 – DIGITAL INFORMATION SEARCH

Once the six schools were identified, further information was gathered through each school's website. Each school's website offered an extensive amount of information that was

then compared with the NDPC/N's 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention (Overview, 2017). The schools used for this research had similar information available on their websites. Each school has general tabs such as About, Policies, Academics, Students, Parents and Community, Enrollment, and Contact Information. Within each of these tabs detailed information can be found about each schools' mission or vision statement, employment opportunities, school events, curriculum, technology, publications, programming, after-school opportunities, sports, and more. (See *Table 3* - Category Definitions and Location of Information).

Table 3. Category Definitions and Location of Information

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Location
Foundational Strategies	Systemic Approach	-a systemic approach & process for ongoing & continuous improvement across all grade levels & among all stakeholders, through a shared & widely communicated vision & focus, data-based decision-making alignment of school policies, procedures, practices, and organizational structures and continuous monitoring of effectiveness.	Website tabs: Home, About, Overview
	School-Community Collaboration	-an engaged and responsive community resulting in a caring & collaborative	Website tabs: Parents & Community, Upcoming Events, Announcements & Events
	Safe Learning Environments	-safe, orderly, nurturing, inclusive, and inviting learning environments help interpersonal skills	Website tabs: Policies, Parent Information,
Early Interventions	Family Engagement	-effective, ongoing, and multi-dimensional, two-way communication as well as ongoing needs assessments and responsive family supports and interventions.	Website tabs: Parent Information, Parents, Parents & Community
	Early Childhood Education	-birth-to-five interventions	NA
	Early Literacy Development	-reading and writing skills are the foundation for effective learning in all subjects.	NA
Basic Core Strategies	Mentoring/ Tutoring	-typically, a one-to-one caring, supportive relationship between a mentor and a mentee that focuses on academic support and is an effective practice when addressing specific needs	Website tabs: Programs, School Programs, Support Services
	Service Learning	-meaningful community service experiences with academic learning.	Website tabs: Parents & Community, Partnerships
	Alternative Schooling	-alternative or non-traditional schooling and delivery model options (e.g., alternative times and environments, blended learning, virtual learning, competency- based credit opportunities)	School Websites: Universal Learners of America Charter School, The Compass Academy Charter School
	Afterschool/	- (e.g., tutoring, credit recovery, acceleration, homework support,	Website tabs:

Table 3 continued

	Out of School Opportunities	etc.) that provide students with opportunities for assistance and recovery as well as high-interest options for discovery and learning	Parents & Community, Students, Programs
Managing & Improving Instruction	Professional Development	-ongoing professional learning opportunities, support, and feedback.	Website tabs: School Calendar
	Active Learning	-engage and involve students in meaningful ways as partners in their own learning. These strategies include student voice and choice; effective feedback, peer assessment, and goal setting; cooperative learning; thinking critically, creatively, and reflectively; and micro-teaching, discussion, and two-way communication.	Website tabs: Academics, Curriculum, Programs
	Educational Technology	-instructional technology can effectively support teaching and learning while engaging students in meaningful, current, and authentic efforts; addressing multiple intelligences; and adapting to students' learning styles. Educational technology can effectively be used in individualized instruction and can not only help prepare students for the workforce & can empower students who struggle with self-esteem.	Website tabs: Academics, Curriculum, Programs
	Individualized Instruction	-individualized, differentiated, or personalized learning activities	Website tabs: Academics, Curriculum, Programs
	Career & Technical Education	Quality CTE programs and related career pathways and guidance programs	Website tabs: N/A

The first author examined each of the aforementioned tabs for the information noted with Table 3 and printed out each available page. The search process continued through each tree of information until reaching pages with no more available hyperlinks.

Once the schools' websites were examined thoroughly, the first author compiled school demographics and graduation rates through the online sources Graphiq Inc. and The Annie E. Foundation Casey (Graphiq Inc., 2017; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017).

One school, Capital Charter High School, has an extensive amount of relevant information available due to the school's pursuance of Middle States Accreditation ("Academics," 2018). This publication offers in-depth information about the school's current programming, as well as a detail plan for improvement and growth ("Academics," 2018).

Data collection and analysis produced over 200 pages of hard copy information and approximately a dozen websites directly related to the review of these six schools. Of the

schools selected, two are affiliated with each other and part of one larger district, two are independent charter schools that met the criteria outlined above, one school is designed to meet the needs of students who were not on track to graduate, and one school is affiliated with the largest public school district in the area and is designed to support students who are juvenile offenders. For the purpose of this paper, the latter two schools will be described as school that support students who are "severely at-risk" of dropping out of school.

3.3 STEP 3 – CODING OF INFORMATION

The information collected throughout the research process was coded using the 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention as the framework. Two main documents were created, an excel document and a word document. Using abbreviations for each category (e.g. FE represented Family Engagement), the excel document acted as a checklist. The purpose of this document was to determine areas of need for additional research. After information was collected and checked off, a word document was created with the same categories and subcategories as the excel sheet. Larger and more detailed notes, examples, and exact wording were placed under each category. Citations we placed in the word document under each line or paragraph of text in the word document, so further information could efficiently be gathered if needed and accurate citations could be formulated.

4.0 RESULTS

The chart below rates each school used for this research in each of the fifteen categories established by the NDPC/N (See *Table 4.* – Program Overview).

Table 4. Program Overview

Category	Sub-category	The Compass Academy CS	Capital Charter High School	Universal Learners of America CS	Upward Directions CS	Pillar CS
Foundational Strategies	Systemic Approach	√	√	√	√	√
	School-Community Collaboration	√	√ +	√	√	√ +
	Safe Learning Environments	√	√	√	√	√
Early Interventions	Family Engagement	√	√	√	√ +	√
	Early Childhood Education	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Early Literacy Development	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Basic Core Strategies	Mentoring/Tutoring	√ +	√	√ +	√	√
	Service Learning	√	√ +	-	√	√ +
	Alternative Schooling	√ +	-	√ +	-	-
	Afterschool//Out of School Opportunities	√	√	-	√	√ +
Managing & Improving Instruction	Professional Development	-	√	-	-	-
	Active Learning	-	√ +	-	-	√ +
	Educational Technology	-	√ +	√	-	√ +
	Individualized	√ +	-	√	√	√

Table 4 continued

	Instruction					
	Career & Technical Education	-	-	-	-	-

Key
√ + = Information indicates a well-developed program
√ = Information about the program is available
- = program does not exist or no information available

4.1 FUNDAMENTAL STRATEGIES

Research indicates that developing or changing an organizations policies, procedures or organizational structure may be necessary to impact graduation rates (Overview, 2017). The research also recognizes barriers to these changes and that schools are under pressures that limit the amount of change that can happen at one time (Van der Vegt et al., 2001). This balancing of pressures school administrators to make systemic, relevant changes based on the specific needs of the school. The NDPC/N's 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention (Overview, 2017) categorizes Fundamental Strategies as the starting point for schools and stakeholders. These foundational structures are the basis from which the school was developed.

4.1.1 Systemic Approach

The prime example of a systemic approach is a school's mission or vision statement. The NDPC/N's research says a school's focus should be "shared and widely communicated" (Overview, pg. 2) in its mission. Since the concept of a charter school was established on the idea that is it different from the traditional neighborhood school a student would attend, the

charter school's mission or vision statement is truly a foundational piece of the school. It may be the reason a parent or child is even researching the school.

Each of the six reviewed schools has a mission or vision statement displayed on their website, and each school uses its mission or vision statement as a way to stand apart from the competition. For example, Capital Charter High School describes its mission as a "technology-infused" (Halpern, 2018) school that seeks to prepare students for life after high school whether that route is post-secondary education, training or employment. Another school, Pillar Charter Schools, publicizes its mission of developing high performing schools in economically underserved communities (Pillar Schools, 2018).

Students who attend The Compass Academy Charter School are often court-adjudicated youth, who if they continue on their current path, would likely fail to earn a high school diploma. The mission of The Compass Academy Charter School is to change that path through a structured program (Where Pride Still Matters, 2014). The programming offered at The Compass Academy follows State requirements for graduation but offers a higher level of support that seeks to meet the needs of highly at-risk youth.

Similarly, the Universal Learners of America Charter School has a challenging student population. For example, one of the requirements for enrolling at Universal Learners of America Charter School include previous withdrawal from high school, be under 21 years old, and have completed enough credits to graduate from the program before turning 21 (Universal Learners of America Charter School, 2018). The mission of this school is for students to attain only the necessary credits required for graduation, and in comparison, to the other schools used for this research, Universal Learners of America Charter School does not have many of the programs other schools have. Additional programming such as after-school opportunities or family

engagement are not part of the mission of Universal Learners of America Charter School. The mission of the school is help under-credited students meet graduation requirements (Universal Learners of America Charter School, 2018). Foundationally though, this school has a systemic program that serves a specific population of students.

For charter schools, the mission or vision should emphasize what makes them different from a traditional public school and not every school was able to do that. Upward Directions Charter School's mission states that the school's "goal is to help every child find a pathway that leads toward a successful adult life in the city environment and beyond" (Upward Directions, 2018). The mission itself does not explain how the school plans to reach this goal or how this charter school is different from other charters or traditional public schools who also have an interest in leading students towards successful adult life.

4.1.2 School-community collaboration

Another aspect of Foundational Strategies includes school-community collaboration. As public charter schools, all of the schools used for this study have a keen interest in gaining the support of local businesses and prominent community members through partnerships. The information available describing these partnerships is most influential for Capital Charter High School and Pillar Schools. Capital Charter High School and Pillar Schools appear to be the well-known and successful schools. Both schools promote their partnerships through their website by mentioning the partnerships by name and providing links to additional information that can be found in news articles, brochures, testimonials, and more. Charter schools, like many other non-profits, rely on connections with other grassroots mission-driven organizations.

Universal Learners of America Charter School was established in 2014 and does not publish or advertise any specific partnerships. However, Universal Learners of America Charter School was the recipient of the 21st Century Learning Grant in 2017 (Schuler, 2017). This grant provided Universal Learners of America Charter School with the opportunity to a Literacy Center (Schuler, 2017).

Each year, at The Compass Academy Charter School, students participate in a roundtable discussion with community leaders and plan a service project (The Compass Academy Charter School, 2018). Service projects are part of a more extensive program that strives to develop skills through character education. Throughout their tenure at The Compass Academy Charter School, students are required to complete two service projects (The Compass Academy Charter School, 2018).

Upward Directions also describes community partnerships. The information available does not go into detail about specific partnerships; however, it does describe the importance of the school, students, parents, and community collaborate to provide opportunities for students. A reoccurring theme with the information available about Upward Directions is the lack of substance. Many common educational topics are referenced throughout the website, but in-depth information is not readily available.

4.1.3 Safe learning environments

Schools are responsible for creating a safe learning environment for students. Each of the schools have intact policies and procedures that promote a safe learning environment. The information was contained on dedicated links or within student handbooks available on-line. The Compass Academy Charter Schools has a specific link to each policy and a link to the student

handbook (The Compass Academy Charter School, 2018). Universal Learners of America Charter School lists less than five policies (Universal Learners of America Charter School, 2018) and Pillar Charter does not have a link to the student handbook but does have policies on-line.

4.1.4 The promise scholarship

The Promise Scholarship is a valuable initiative for students living in this mid-Atlantic city. Five of the six schools included in this research have students who are eligible to receive the Promise Scholarship. This scholarship is sponsored and funded by many local foundations, non-profit organizations, and philanthropic individuals. Students are eligible for the Promise Scholarship if they reside in this particular mid-Atlantic city, attend the city's public high school or one of its charters from 9th grade until graduation, earn a cumulative, unweighted GPA of 2.5 or more, and graduate with a minimum attendance record of 90% (The Promise Scholarship, n.d.). Students who receive the scholarship must use the scholarship money to attend an accredited college, university, or trade and technical school within the State. The Promise Scholarship is unique in that is it not based on family income, there are no limits on the number of students who can receive the scholarship, and it is not a competition (The Promise Scholarship, n.d.). As long as the student meets the requirements of the scholarship, the student will receive up to $5,000 per year for four years.

This scholarship offers students an opportunity to change their lives through education. Students can meet the eligibility requirements of this scholarship upon entering 9th grade. Their most significant obstacle to overcome to receive the scholarship is to maintain their eligibility by attending school and participating in their education. For students living in this mid-Atlantic city, the Promise Scholarship is a significant asset to each schools' educational programming.

4.2 EARLY INTERVENTIONS

Only one of the schools, Pillar Charter Schools, selected for this research had a program designed support early childhood education and early literacy development. This school system has two elementary schools that are part of the same district. All of the other schools begin at eighth grade or later. Furthermore, two of the schools, The Compass Academy Charter School and Universal Learners of America Charter School, are designed to support severely at-risk students who have not been successful in the traditional public school system. The core foundation of their programs addresses the needs of older students, and therefore, early childhood education and early literacy development are not part of their programs.

The NDPC/N defines family engagement in the early intervention category because "family engagement has a direct, positive effect on youth's achievement and is one of the most accurate predictors of a student's success in school" (Overview, 2017). Since the purpose of this research is to analyze the programming of high schools, family engagement is addressed.

4.2.1 Family engagement

All of the schools except for Universal Learners of America Charter School specifically address family engagement. Universal Learners of America Charter School eliminates as many external factors as possible and focuses solely on students taking only the necessary courses required for earning a diploma. Their goal is not to remediate learning, develop students socially, repair family relationships. For all of the other schools, family engagement is typically part of the school's mission or vision statement, core foundation, or support services. Upward Directions expects parents to volunteer at least ten hours per school year and attend three

meetings per school year. While there is no evidence available on whether these expectations are followed through on, it is clear the school values family engagement. The Compass Academy Charter School has a Family Services Team that supports family involvement with each student. The team conducts regular home visits to promote continuous relationships with families.

The other three schools seem to have a typical amount of family engagement for any public school. These schools host family activities and community events. These schools indicate they value family engagement. However, the information available is not expansive.

4.3 BASIC CORE STRATEGIES

These subcategories focus on the importance of social development through relationships established through non-academic programs. Programs such as afterschool opportunities, service learning opportunities, and mentoring or tutoring opportunities are designed to support students' overall character development. Programming that occurs after school is important; however, the programming that is offered during the school day may be a deciding factor for students who are considering dropping of school. Academic programs are one component of the school day, but the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network focuses on elective or additional programming as well. One area of focus is the availability of mentoring and tutoring for students in need.

4.3.1 Mentoring/tutoring

All six of the schools used in this study publish information about mentoring and tutoring. For Universal Learners of America Charter School supports such as mentoring and

tutoring are offered as a way to guide students to graduation. Students at Universal Learners of America have opportunities to receive guidance in the areas of career counseling, career readiness training, academic counseling, mentoring, social service referrals (housing, child care, legal, etc.), tutoring, job referrals and internships, post-secondary transition planning, and personal finance counseling (Universal Learners of America, 2018). Pillar Schools, The Compass Academy Charter School, Capital Charter High School, and Upward Directions have guidance opportunities in the areas of transition planning. However, students attending Universal Learners of America Charter School have already withdrawn from high school. They are attempting to earn a diploma, and therefore the need for mentoring and tutoring is significant. The schools used for this research use their website to advertise mentoring and tutoring opportunities, as well as counseling programs and student other support services.

4.3.2 Service-learning

Another supplemental type of programming schools can develop, which can occur during the school day or after school, or service learning opportunities. These often take the form of a graduation project. The State's graduation requirements do not include a graduation project (22 Pa. Code § 57.31), yet some schools have opted to include a graduation project as part of their school requirements. Of the schools used for this research two require graduation projects.

At Capital Charter School, the Graduation Project takes place over two years, and the final grade must be at least 70%. Several components of the Graduation Project must be completed during one's junior year including a weekly Independent Learning Grade, letter of intent, annotated bibliography, notes demonstrating in-depth research, literature review rough draft. The project continues throughout the senior year of high school. Components include a

weekly Independent Learning Grade, written Action Project, literature review, a blog detailing independent work, presentation, and final reflection.

This project, along with a required 130-hour internship allows Capital Charter High School to advertise that 100% of students will have real-world work experience upon graduation ("Capital Charter High School Brochure," 2015). The school's mission of preparing students for life after school is truly represented in these components of the school's curriculum. Capital Charter High School School's graduation requirements are above the State requirements and other schools used for this research.

4.3.3 Alternative schooling

Alternative schooling is only offered at The Compass Academy Charter School and Universal Learners of America Charter School. In fact, it is the nature of their program and their strongest area. The Compass Academy Charter School and Universal Learners of America Charter School implement programs that emphasize supporting students who are severely at risk of dropping out to earn their diplomas. These programs have some commonalities; however, they were established on different foundations, and overall do not demonstrate significant similarities in their programming.

For example, Universal Learners of America Charter School enrolls students who are between the ages of 17-21 who have previously withdrawn from high school. The Compass Academy Charter School seeks to enroll students who have been exposed to the juvenile justice system. The programming available specifically at Universal Learners of America Charter School is limited, and it is meant to be that way. Universal Learners of America Charter School's programming is designed to offer only State required credits with some guidance on

post-secondary transition. Purposefully, Universal Learners of America Charter School does not offer additional classes or credits. All of the other schools used for this research have more in-depth programming which is designed to support the overall development of the individual student. Both types of programs fulfill a need within the education system. The other schools used for this research do not advertise their connection with alternative schooling.

4.3.4 Afterschool/out-of-school opportunities

Pillar Schools have after-school programs available district-wide. Students are provided with a bus pass to promote participation. Pillar Schools, when compared to the other schools used for this study, have the most in-depth after-school programming available. Universal Learners of America Charter School does not offer any after-school opportunities. Capital Charter High School, Upward Directions, and The Compass Charter School offer occasional activities or events after school, but nothing that truly engages students after school hours on a consistent basis. Based on the research of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, it would be beneficial for Capital Charter High School, Upward Directions, and The Compass Charter School to develop "constructive and engaging" activities to decrease the loss of information that occurs when students are not in school.

4.4 MANAGING AND IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

The continuous evaluation of the programs being offered to students is relevant when determining their effectiveness and relevance towards the student body. For charter schools,

staying relevant is imperative to their success. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network's research "ongoing and continuous improvement across all grade levels and among all stakeholders" (Overview, 2017), is a key component in identifying the needs of the school.

4.4.1 Professional development

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network describes the importance of professional development for educators as, "ongoing professional learning opportunities, support, and feedback" (Overview, pg. 2). Professional development is a two-way communicative process that allows teachers to identify their areas of needs. For the purpose of this research, there is not a significant about of publicly available information regarding professional development. Each of the schools used for this study has access to professional development through their local intermediate unit and a State-wide agency. These schools are subject to the same State and Federal training requirements (e.g. Mandated Reporter training or Suicide Awareness training) however, schools typically do not publish information regarding specific professional development initiatives or programs. Professional development days are often identified as a clerical days or in-service days on the schools' calendar. Students are not in school during those days, however, teachers are scheduled to attend.

4.4.2 Active learning

Active learning is sub-category that focuses on exposing students to content that is engaging and meaningful. The research says that when educators show students that there are

different ways to learn, students can find new and creative ways to solve problems, achieve success, and become lifelong learners (Doren, Murray, & Gau, 2014; Reschley & Christenson, 2006). Capital Charter High School actively engages students through grade-level field experiences and an extensive graduation project requirement that involve an internship (Capital Charter High School School, 2015). Upward Directions Charter School has programming that emphasizes theme-based coursework and extensive field-based project work (Upward Directions, 2018). Pillar Charter Schools promotes experiential learning through advanced courses, college dual enrollment courses, advanced placement courses, internships, world language, arts program (Pillar Schools, 2018). The Compass Academy Charter School and Universal Learners of America Charter School do not have information available related to active learning strategies.

The schools used for this research that have information available about active learning strategies often refer to this programming in the context of project-based learning. The State's graduation requirements do not include a graduation project (22 Pa. Code § 57.31), yet some schools have opted to add a graduation project as part of their school requirements. Of the schools used for this research two require graduation projects. Additionally, and as referenced earlier, five of the six schools used for this study require service learning projects.

4.4.3 Educational technology

Research suggests that by integrating technology into the curriculum, educators can actively engage students and individualize the content (Overview, 2017). Universal Learners of America Charter School requires students to complete five and a half hours coursework daily (Universal Learners of America Charter School, 2018). This translates to three hours of

coursework onsite at school and an additional two and a half hours on their own time (Universal Learners of America Charter School, 2018). Pillar Charter Schools implements 1-1 technology where each student has a personal device (Pillar Schools, 2018). The curriculum at Capital Charter High School is described on their website as a "technology-based school with a rigorous approach to interdisciplinary, project-based learning" (Capital Charter High School, 2018). The Compass Academy Charter School and Upward Directions do not have information available regarding ways technology is integrated into their curriculum.

4.4.4 Individualized instruction

. All of the schools used for this research describe individualization within their school system. It is often referred to in the context of special education. The terms individualization or differentiated instruction are often used to describe aspects of a school's mission or vision statement, academics, or support services. In alignment with the recommendations of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, Capital Charter High School uses technology as a way to individualize instruction (Capital Charter High School, 2018; Overview, 2017).

4.4.5 Career and technical education

Research shows that career and technical education is effective in supporting post-high school employment and increased earnings (Wagner et al., 2016). None of the schools used for this research have an established partnership with a vocational education school, and none of them have a foundational goal of promoting success during high school through exposure to vocational education.

5.0 DISCUSSION

Many significant challenges arise from the dropout crisis in America (Chappell et al., 2015). At the individual level, students who drop-out from high school face many disadvantages, both the short and long term (Chappell et al., 2015). Society as a whole struggles when many individuals are unable to reach their potential. In an attempt to work toward a solution, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network has proposed 15 researched-based strategies to impact graduation rates positively. The 15 guiding strategies play an integral role by informing families on what they should be looking for in a school. Charter schools continue to grow as a popular and controversial educational choice. Thus, the current research examines how charter schools in one mid-Atlantic City address dropout prevention in relation to the recommended strategies via an analysis of all available web-based content.

Summarized and synthesized results show that the programming offered within the reviewed schools can readily be organized according to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network categories. The materials collected showed that all of the schools, to varying degrees, address the four major dropout prevision categories. Some schools (e.g., Pillar CS) cover a majority of the areas to a considerable degree. Other schools (e.g., Upward Directions and The Compass Academy) do not cover the same amount of programming information as others. Additionally, certain categories (e.g., Foundational) received much more attention overall

as compared to others (e.g., Early Interventions). Combined, the reviewed charter schools do attend to dropout prevention, but maintain different outcomes.

Ideally, schools that attend to the 15 dropout-prevention strategies should show the effects with reduced dropout rates. Table 4 shows the relationship between graduation rates of the reviewed schools and the categorical coding results. Limited to correlational patterns only, some interesting findings emerge.

Table 5. Rating Consolidation

School	Graduation Rate	-	√	√ +
The Compass Academy Charter School	70%	4	6	3
Capital Charter School	90%	3	6	4
Universal Learners of America Charter School	90%	5	6	2
Upward Directions Charter School	90%	5	7	1
Pillar Charter Schools	75%	3	5	5

First, four of the schools maintain graduation rates at or higher than the national average (i.e., 75%). That may or may not be a result of the numerous positive programs available, but it does suggest positive characteristics of the schools. Second, the presence or absence of information about programs may not directly relate to how well a program is implemented. For example, Pillar Charter Schools had the lowest amount of –'s and the highest amount of √ +'s, yet their graduation was 15% lower than three of the other charter schools used for this research. Furthermore, Upward Directions Charter School is tied for the highest amount –'s and has the

lowest amount of √ +'s, yet their graduation rate is 90% which is at the top with two other charter schools. The data show that online information, while related, can only go so far. Additional data collection methods (i.e., survey, interview, observation, etc.) may provide more clarity.

5.1 SPECIFIC CATEGORIES

The schools used for this research seek to provide a well-rounded education to students with meaningful experiences that promote student success in high school and after high school. Transitioning from high school to post-secondary training, education or work with a diploma is a vital part of success. As Song and Hsu (2008) state, "high school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, in poor health, living in poverty, in prison, on public assistance, and to have children who also drop out of high school (pg. 7)". Using the research done by the National Dropout Prevention/Center Network, this research highlights three areas that strongly support students who are at-risk for dropping out of school; school-community collaboration, service learning, and mentoring/tutoring. These areas engage students in a learning process that supports their development outside of the traditional classroom setting.

Regarding school-community collaboration, two schools stood out among the others; Capital Charter High School and Pillar Charter Schools. These schools also rated the highest in the areas of active learning and service learning. The correlation between these sub-categories exists within each school's requirement for a graduation project and an intense focus on service learning opportunities such as community service. These requirements allow students the opportunity to apply concepts they learned in the classroom to the community. Students can

support their community while being exposed to opportunities that may spark students' interests for their future. Research shows that students who feel a sense of belonging at school are more likely to stay in school (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004).

School-community collaboration, service learning, and mentoring/tutoring are essential areas of focus for schools. However, areas such as a systemic approach and safe-learning are less apparent to those viewing a school's website yet are also necessary for the success of the school. They are less evident to parents researching the school, and the impact of these areas may only be noticeable once a student spends time in the school. All of the schools used for this research had information available describing their mission or vision, core principles, and safety policies. For charter schools, the mission or vision is the driving force of what makes them different than the traditional public school and likely the reason the charter was granted. Therefore, it is extremely important for charter schools to adhere to their mission or vision. Administrators and Board members should seek consistent feedback from stakeholders to determine if the mission of the school is accurately being implemented in the school.

There is one area that set two schools used for this research apart from the others, alternative schooling. Universal Learners of America Charter School and The Compass Academy Charter School are both alternative schools. The primary goal of Universal Learners of America Charter School is to support under-credited students in their quest for a high school diploma. The Compass Academy Charter School is a public charter school that focuses on supporting court adjudicated youth. These foundational differences set them apart from the other schools, and while their programming does not follow the research of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network’s 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention (Overview 2017),

there is a need for this type of programming. By supporting the needs of this acute population, these schools serve as the final opportunity for students to earn their actual diploma.

Strengths aside, certain important transition strategies did not appear in the reviewed materials or were underdeveloped. For example, family engagement and professional development are critical aspects for preventing dropout. These strategies occur across the entire educational experience and play a critical role in their own right (Chappell et al., 2015). Family engagement is a more subjective form of student support and schools must allocate resources to developing opportunities for families while reducing barriers such as child care and transportation. Charter schools specifically must consider that the school itself may not be located in the neighborhood where most students enrolled live. This can create a barrier to family engagement. By seeking continuous feedback from families, schools can create events or activities specific to the needs of that school.

While each school may attend to these aspects, the information did not appear online and may be better addressed through additional research. Links on each schools' website for parents and event calendars for parent events do not speak to the level of involvement parents have. Similarly, even though the State and each school requires a minimum amount of professional development, the areas of focus for professional development sessions are not available publicly. There are also barriers to researching early childhood development and early literacy development from the standpoint of high school programming. All of the schools used for this research are invested in supporting students and literacy development is vital for all ages, yet it is difficult to connect specific high school programs to early childhood development and early literacy development. Information related to these categories should appear prominently on any

materials, if the school provides the services. If unavailable, schools should look to include those services where possible.

Inconsistent attention also occurred for active learning, educational technology, individualized instruction and after-school programming areas. Active learning and individualized instruction may be implicitly included in each schools programming; however, most of the schools did not feature specific programs highlighting these components. At times, keywords such as individual, engaging, or active were used to describe the structure of the schools' curriculum, but nothing specifically correlated to a program. Educational technology was similar in that technology was mentioned on each schools' website, and with the except of Capital Charter High School being one-to-one, the schools used for this research most likely use technology often but do not describe it as a staple of their programming. Afterschool programming is the most defined at Pillar Charter Schools, and this aligns with their mission that poverty does not determine educational performance (Pillar Schools, 2018). By providing after opportunities, Pillar Charter Schools seeks to expose students to activities and events that they may not otherwise have access to. Except for Pillar Schools, the schools used for this research schools did not have regular after-school opportunities.

Finally, there is one specific area the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network includes in the 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention that is missing from the programming offered at all of the schools used for this research; career and technical education (CTE). None of the schools used for this research published information about CTE. Moreover, while there may be options for students to attend CTE schools, that information was not found. One reason for this lack of programming is that establishing partnerships with vocational education schools may be a daunting task for schools, but the research says CTE can provide

“youth need workplace skills as well as awareness and focus to increase not only the likelihood that they will be prepared for their careers" (Overview, 2017). Research indicates vocational education may be an incentive for students to stay in school and earn their diploma. According to Wagner et al. (2016), students who completed three or more years of career and technical education courses had a 90% chance of graduating (Wagner et al., 2016). Program development in this area can offer schools a way to develop skilled students who are ready for the workforce upon graduation. This particular mid-Atlantic city has a high need for skilled trade workers, and this lack of programming is an area of need.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

A limitation of this research is the researcher was limited to only the content available online. By viewing only online content, the researcher could not verify the depth to which these schools participated in their community partnerships. Additionally, the researcher could not determine whether or not the schools used for this research offered a career and technical education program. Alternative schooling is clearly offered by two of the schools. However, the other three schools used for this research may offer alternative schooling, but that information is not available online. Finally, professional development is an area is regulated, to some degree, by the State. The researcher could not verify the amount or types of professional development that were offered to each schools’ staff because it was not published online.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS

Increasing graduation rates has implications locally and nationally. To positively affect the graduation rate, it seems imperative that research continues in the area of dropout prevention. By evaluating current educational programming, finding positives, determining areas of weakness, and creating a plan that uses research-based techniques schools can successfully support students' path towards graduation. The goal of the current study is to determine effective practices that are being used in urban charter school in a mid-Atlantic city. Two schools stood out from the rest; Capital Charter High School and Pillar Charter Schools. A common theme between these schools and categories established by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network is the number of times Capital Charter High School, and Pillar Charter Schools had in-depth information available. These schools have invested in both the programming and the publication of this programming, so it is available to families.

5.4 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The importance of continued research in the area of dropout prevention is apparent through the work of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and many others. As mentioned a limitation of this research is the researcher was limited to only the content available online. To broaden this scope of research, two surveys were developed using the National Drop Out Prevention Center/Network's 15 Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention (Overview, 2017); one for administrators and one for teachers. Of the 15 strategies described by the NDPC/N, 13 were used for this survey. The purpose of these surveys is to expand upon publicly

available information and identify gaps in programming. All of the questions in this survey can be categorized as nonthreatening behavioral questions related to school district programming and general demographic questions (Mertens, 2015).

5.5 ADMINISTRATOR VS. TEACHER SURVEYS AND DEMONSTRATION OF EXCELLENCE

This study proposes two surveys for future research; an administrator survey (*Appendix 1.*- Administrator Survey Questions) and a teacher survey (*Appendix 2.*- Teacher Survey Questions). Intended participants include administrators and teachers of grades 9-12. Many similarities exist between the surveys in the areas of School-Community Collaboration, Safe Learning Environments, Family Engagement, Mentoring/Tutoring, Service Learning Opportunities, Alternative Schooling, After School Opportunities, and Career and Technology Education. The subtopics reference organizational programs and the questions asked in the surveys are designed to gain insight into the programs themselves.

The following sub-sections ask different questions between the surveys to gain varying perspectives of the programs administrators are implementing, Systemic Approach, Professional Development, Active Learning, Educational Technology, and Individualized Instruction. These subsections reference the teacher's philosophy of education, which allows for the Teacher Survey to ask opinion questions. While these subsections are still relevant to the administrator survey, they focus more on their organization's approach to these subtopics.

Once teachers and administrators complete the survey, the information can be analyzed to identify areas of strength and areas of improvement in school programming through the lens of

the research done by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Additionally, school districts that take a vested interest in dropout prevention can categorize their current programming using the NDPC/N's 15 recommended strategies as this research did. By taking a comprehensive approach to the topic of dropout prevention, school districts can potentially make an impact on the number of students who graduate.

APPENDIX A: Administrator Survey Questions

1. Systemic Approach

- Does your school or district have a mission or vision statement?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

  If yes,

    - Does the mission or vision statement have specific goals and objectives?
        - Yes
        - No
        - I don't know

- If teachers are assigned a mentor, about how often do mentors and mentees meet?
        - 1 x per school year
        - 2 x per school year
        - 1 x per trimester
        - 1 x per quarter
        - 1 x per month
        - More than 1 x per month
        - Teachers are not assigned a mentor

  If yes,

- Is the feedback provided to administration?
        - Yes
        - No
        - I don't know

2. School – Community Collaboration

- Do outside organizations work with students at your school through a program your school offers (i.e. Boy Scouts, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Girl Scouts, tutoring services, etc.)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

- Are job-shadowing opportunities available for students who would like to shadow jobs they are interested in?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

  If yes,

- In your opinion, how many students participate in job shadowing opportunities?
    - Between 0%-5%
    - Between 6%-10%
    - Between 11%-15%
    - Between 16%-20%
    - Greater than 21%

- Does your school offer a work study program where students can spend part of the school day at work?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

3. Safe Learning Environments

- Does your school implement a school-wide positive behavior program?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

- Does your school implement a Zero Tolerance Policy?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

- Does your school implement a Restorative Justice program?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

If yes,

- Do you feel the Restorative Justice program is beneficial to the overall environment of the school?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

- Do you feel Restorative Justice has helped individual students?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

- Do you feel Restorative Justice is implemented properly?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

4. Family Engagement

- Does your school make attempts throughout the school year to involve parents in their child's education and the school (i.e. parent volunteer opportunities, parent organization)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

- How would you rate the level of parent involvement in your school?
    - Very low parent involvement
    - Low parent involvement
    - Average parent involvement
    - High parent involvement
    - Very high parent involvement

- When a student seems to be at-risk for dropping out of school, is the parent called to the school for a meeting to discuss the student's academic situation?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

- Family engagement is described as "one of the most accurate predictors for a student's success in school." For students that you have known who dropped out of school, in your opinion, was lack of family engagement a major factor?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Sometimes
  - I don't know
  - I don't know anyone who has dropped out of school
  - Other_____

5. Mentoring/Tutoring

- Does your school offer any of the following mentoring opportunities?
  - school-based mentoring
  - community-based mentoring
  - adult-student mentoring
  - peer mentoring
  - adult-student tutoring
  - peer tutoring
  - Other_____

If yes,

- Approximately what percentage students participate in these opportunities combined?
  - Between 0%-5%
  - Between 6%-10%
  - Between 11%-15%
  - Between 16%-20%
  - Between 21%-25%
  - Greater than 26%

- Do you feel more students could benefit from participating in these opportunities?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know

- For students who show signs of being at risk for dropping out, are they assigned a mentor?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know

6. Service Learning Opportunities:

- Does your school or district offer service learning opportunities such as peer tutoring, donation drives, student presentations on topics (drugs and alcohol, teen pregnancy, etc.), student maintained gardens, student council, student-run recycling program, etc.
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

- Approximately what percent of students participate in these opportunities combined?
    - Between 0%-5%
    - Between 6%-10%
    - Between 11%-15%
    - Between 16%-20%
    - Between 21%-25%
    - Greater than 26%

7. Alternative Schooling

- Does your school or district offer alternative schooling for students who are not successful in the traditional classroom setting? (i.e. online classes, summer classes, credit recovery options during the school year or summertime). This does not include a decision to send a student to an approved private school.
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

  If yes,

- Approximately what percentage of students participate in alternative schooling?
    - Between 0%-5%
    - Between 6%-10%
    - Greater than 11%

- Do you feel more students could benefit from participating in an alternative schooling option?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

8. After School Opportunities:

- Does your school offer any after school opportunities for students (tutoring, clubs, sports, etc.)?
    - Yes

- No
- I do not know

If yes,

- Which of the following does your school offer: (check all that apply)
  - Sporting teams
  - Clubs
  - Tutoring
  - Family Nights
  - Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts
  - Extended Care
  - Other _____

- Approximately what percentage of students participate in these opportunities combined?
  - Between 0%-20%
  - Between 21%-40%
  - Between 41%-60%
  - Between 61%-80%
  - Between 81%-100%

- Do you feel more students could benefit from participating in these opportunities?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know

9. Professional Development:

- How do you determine the professional development sessions that are required for teachers to attend?
  - Check all that apply:
    - Teachers are surveyed to determine their PD preferences
    - Administrators attend meetings to discuss appropriate PD
    - Administrators and teachers attend meetings to discuss appropriate PD
    - Cost is considered when scheduling PD
    - State and Federal funding requirements for PD are considered

- Are teachers granted opportunities to attend PD sessions that are available outside of the district scheduled PD?
  - Yes
  - No

10. Active Learning

- Are teachers encouraged to create lessons that actively engage students in the learning process?
    - Yes
    - No

- How have you observed teachers actively engaging students? (check all that apply)
    - By using technology
    - Multi-sensory lesson
    - Project-based learning
    - Science experiments
    - Community collaboration
    - Guest speakers
    - Please list others _____

- Do you feel students are more likely to stay in school when they are actively engaged?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

11. Educational Technology

- Are teachers encouraged to use technology?
    - Yes
    - No

  If yes,

- How often would you like for teacher to incorporate technology in their classroom content delivery?
    - At least 1 time per month
    - At least 2 times per month
    - At least 1 time per week
    - At least 2 or more times per week
    - I do not have a preference for how often teacher use technology

- What types of technology do teachers have access to?
    - Desktop computers
    - Laptop computers
    - Tablets
    - Smartboards
    - Other

12. Individualized Instruction

- Does your organization encourage teachers to use differentiated instruction in their classrooms?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

- Have you observed teachers differentiating instruction?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

13. Career & Technology Education

- Do students from your school have opportunities to attend a vocational education facility for course credits?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

- Approximately what percent of students participate in these opportunities combined?
        - Between 0%-5%
        - Between 6%-10%
        - Greater than 11%

- Do you feel more students could benefit from participating in these opportunities?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

- Does your school have a transition coordinator?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

APPENDIX B: Teacher Survey Questions

1. Systemic Approach

- Does your school or district have a mission or vision statement?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

  If yes,

    - Does the mission or vision statement have specific goals and objectives?
        - Yes
        - No
        - I don't know

- If teachers are assigned a mentor, about how often do mentors and mentees meet?
    - 1 x per school year
    - 2 x per school year
    - 1 x per trimester
    - 1 x per quarter
    - 1 x per month
    - More than 1 x per month
    - Teachers are not assigned a mentor

- Is documentation of the mentor's feedback or suggestions provided to administration?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

2. School – Community Collaboration

- Do outside organizations work with students at your school through a program your school offers (i.e. Boy Scouts, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Girl Scouts, tutoring services, etc.)?
    - Yes

- No
- I don't know

- Are job-shadowing opportunities available for students who would like to shadow jobs they are interested in?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know

  If yes,

- In your opinion, how many students participate in job shadowing opportunities?
  - Between 0%-5%
  - Between 6%-10%
  - Between 11%-15%
  - Between 16%-20%
  - Greater than 21%

- Does your school offer a work study program where students can spend part of the school day at work?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know

3. Safe Learning Environments

- Does your school implement a school-wide positive behavior program?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know

- What techniques are used to promote a positive behavioral climate? (check all that apply)
  - Restorative Justice
  - Schoolwide Positive Behavior Incentive and Supports (SW-PBIS or SW-PBS)
  - Get Caught Being Kind (or similar kindness initiative)
  - Stop Bullying (or similar anti-bullying campaign)
  - Other_____

4. Family Engagement

- Does your school make attempts throughout the school year to involve parents in their child's education and the school (i.e. parent volunteer opportunities, parent organization)?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

- How would you rate the level of parent involvement in your school?
  - Very low parent involvement
  - Low parent involvement
  - Average parent involvement
  - High parent involvement
  - Very high parent involvement

- When a student seems to be at-risk for dropping out of school, is the parent called to the school for a meeting to discuss the student's academic situation?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know

- Family engagement is described as "one of the most accurate predictors for a student's success in school." For students that you have known who dropped out of school, in your opinion, was lack of family engagement a major factor?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Sometimes
  - I don't know
  - I don't know anyone who has dropped out of school
  - Other_____

5. Mentoring/Tutoring

Teacher

- Does your school offer any of the following mentoring opportunities?
  - school-based mentoring
  - community-based mentoring
  - adult-student mentoring
  - peer mentoring
  - adult-student tutoring
  - peer tutoring
  - Other_____

If yes,

- Approximately what percentage students participate in these opportunities combined?
  - Between 0%-20%

- Between 21%-40%
- Between 41%-60%
- Between 61%-80%
- Between 81%-100%

- For students who show signs of being at risk for dropping out, are they assigned a mentor?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know

6. Service Learning Opportunities:

- Does your school or district offer service learning opportunities such as peer tutoring, donation drives, student presentations on topics (drugs and alcohol, teen pregnancy, etc.), student maintained gardens, student council, student-run recycling program, etc.
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know

  If yes,

- Approximately what percent of students participate in these opportunities combined?
  - Between 0%-5%
  - Between 5%-10%
  - Between 11%-15%
  - Between 16%-20%
  - Between 21%-25%
  - Greater than 26%

7. Alternative Schooling

- Does your school or district offer alternative schooling for students who are not successful in the traditional classroom setting? (i.e. online classes, summer classes, credit recovery options during the school year or summertime). This does not include a decision to send a student to an approved private school.
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know

  If yes,

- Approximately what percentage of students participate in alternative schooling?
  - Between 0%-5%
  - Between 6%-10%
  - Greater than 11%

- Do you feel more students could benefit from participating in an alternative schooling option?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

8. After School Opportunities:

- Does your school offer any after school opportunities for students (tutoring, clubs, sports, etc.)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

If yes,

- Which of the following does your school offer: (check all that apply)
    - Sporting teams
    - Clubs
    - Tutoring
    - Family Nights
    - Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts
    - Extended Care
    - Other _____

- Approximately what percentage of students participate in these opportunities combined?
        - Between 0%-5%
        - Between 6%-10%
        - Between 11%-15%
        - Between 16%-20%
        - Between 21-25%
        - Greater then 26%

- Do you feel more students could benefit from participating in these opportunities?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

9. Professional Development:

- Do you have ability to choose PD for yourself in addition to the district's scheduled PD?
    - Yes
    - No

- Do administrators ask for PD recommendations from teachers?

- Yes
- No

10. Active Learning

- How would you describe your teaching methods related to content coverage and active engagement?
  - My emphasis is on content coverage and less on active engagement
  - I try to cover content and actively engage students equally
  - My emphasis is on active engagement and less on content delivery

- Compared to other teachers, how much do you think you actively engage students in the learning process?
  - Much less
  - Less
  - The same
  - More
  - Much More

- Do you feel students are more likely to stay in school when they are actively engaged?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I do not know

11. Educational Technology

- How would you describe your use of technology to deliver content in the classroom?
  - I do not use technology to deliver content
  - I use technology 1 time per month
  - I use technology 2 times per month
  - I use technology 1 time per week
  - I use technology 2 or more times per week

- What types of technology do teachers have access to?
  - Desktop computers
  - Laptop computers
  - Tablets
  - Smartboards
  - Other_____

- In what way do you use technology to engage students?
    - Interactive websites
    - Long-distance video calling (skype)
    - Research
    - Daily lessons
    - Content relevant games
    - Email
    - Other_____

- Do you like using technology during your lessons?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Sometimes

- Do you feel students would benefit more if you used technology more often in your lessons?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know
    - I already use technology often

12. Individualized Instruction

- Compared to other teachers, how would you describe the varying levels of student ability within your classes?
    - The students in each class are generally the same ability level
    - There is an average amount of variability
    - Each class has many student ability levels

- How often do you assess students to determine their knowledge of the content being presented? (check all that apply)
    - Daily
    - Weekly
    - Monthly
    - At the end of each lesson
    - At the end of each chapter
    - At the end of each unit
    - At the end of the semester
    - At the end of the school year

- Do you use student assessment scores to determine future lesson planning?
    - Yes
    - No

- Do you split students up during lessons and teach varying levels of content (differentiated instruction)?
    - Yes
    - No

If yes,

- How often do you split up students into groups to provide differentiated instruction?
    - Daily
    - Weekly
    - Monthly

13. Career & Technology Education

- Do students from your have school opportunities to attend a vocational education facility for course credits?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

- Approximately what percent of students participate in these opportunities combined?
        - Between 0%-5%
        - Between 6%-10%
        - Greater than 11%

- Do you feel more students could benefit from participating in these opportunities?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

- Does your school have a transition coordinator?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I do not know

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